critical digest

VOL. IV No. 34 April 21, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Candida-National, 4/22/52. Thomas Hammond presents "in person" Olivia de Havilland in a revival of Bernard Shaw's comedy drama. Herman Shumlin directed cast which features Ron Randell, Terrance Kilburn and Bramwell Fletcher...To Be Continued-Booth, 4/23/52. Guthrie McClintic presents a new comedy by William Marchant with Dorothy Stickney, Jean Dixon and Luella Gear. Staged by the producer...The Victim-President, 4/25/52. Second limited run production of David Heilwell, Robert W. Winter-Berger who present a new play by Leonard Lesley, Elliott Sullivan, Lloyd Gough and Anne Hegira in cast, staged by Peter Frye.

Digests of Current Reviews - late reviews back page

The Chase-Playhouse, 4/15/52. Split reviews filed by daily critics on Jose Ferrer's production of Horton Foote's new play. News, Mirror, Journal American and Eagle appraisers okayed Ferrer's third 48th Street production of the season as a worth while drama with a Western accent. McClain, Journal American, wrote sole rave, while others had reservations on slightly moralizing script. Direction by Ferrer was credited as most outstanding element, with praises shared by entire cast headed by John Hodiak and Kim Hunter. Chapman, News, liked it more for production than for script. Critic suggested new ending to make it more melodramatic. Atkinson, Times, and Kerr, Herald Tribune, panned it for being pretentious and dull. Watts, Post, marked it as a near miss because it repeated itself too much. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, found it more nervous than exciting. Dash, Women's Wear, agreed with others who found interesting small bits, but he didn't think it was enough for an evening's enjoyment.

The Grass Harp-Martin Beck, 3/28/52. Three "cons" and one "pro" added to critical file of Saint Subber production of Truman Capote adaptation of his novel by weekly critics. Marshall, Nation, admitted she hung her head in embarrassment at what seemed to be the fatuous goings on. George Jean Nathan disliked it for three reasons. It splashes with school boy writing, its humor is literal and frayed, and confusion results by corrupting the fantasy with realism. With few exceptions Nathan found acting on stock company level. Bentley, New Republic, blamed trite treatment of trite theme, plus fact that director Robert Lewis was unsure of himself. Mildred Natwick won top acting honors in that department, with Virgil Thomson's music praised by all. Production recommended by Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, for being imaginative, creative theatre. Tender, fragile comedy, he stated, compensates with affection and theatrical skill what it might lack in dramatic suspense.

Betty Hutton At Palace-4/12/52. Current two-a-day vaudeville show rated by most of daily critics as best of season, even topping the Judy Garland opener. Supporting bill consisting of Herb Shriner, The Skylarks, Borrah Minevitch's Harmonica Rascals, Andre, Andre and Bonnie and The Dassle Brothers were praised by most. Pihodna, Herald Tribune, bets the limited four week run could be extended all summer. McClain, Journal American, rated it as good as any regular Broadway musical revue. All were impressed with Hutton trapeze swinging finale.

News & Notes

Shows that closed include One Bright Day, the twin Cleopatras and The Brass Ring. ..Ethel Colby, Journal of Commerce, begins "Broadway Matinee" TV show Monday, Wednesday and Friday over WABD, New York, at 1:30 PM...ANTA Album postponed this year.

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' NYC Criticism At A Glance '

D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly B - Broadcast

DT - NY Times	DJC - Journal of Commerce	WCM - Chr. Science Monitor
DH - NY Herald Tribune	DWJ - Wall St. Journal	WC - Commonweal
DN - NY News	DWW - Women's Wear	WCU - Cue
DM - NY Mirror	WB - Billboard	WN - Nation
DC - NY Compass	WV - Variety	WNR - New Republic
DP - NY Post	WCD - Critical Digest	WNS - Newsweek
DJ - NY Journal American	WGN - George Jean Nathan	WNY - New Yorker
DW - NY World Tele-Sun	WWM - Ward Morehouse	WSR - Saturday Review
DB - Brooklyn Eagle	BC - WCBS Bill Leonard	WT - Time
DL - L.I.Press	BL - New Leader-WEVD	MP - Park East

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise stated critics voted "pro."

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50	Con: WB WN WNR
FLIGHT INTO EGYPT-3/18/52	Pro: DN DM DC DP DJ DB DL DJC DWW BC WT
THE FOURPOSTER -10/24/51	Con: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY None: DWJ WN WNR WSR
GIGI-11/24/51	Con: DT DM DC DP DW WWM BL WCU WNR WSR WT None: BC
THE GRASS HARP-3/27/52	Pro: DT DP DJ DW DB DL DJC WCU WM
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	Con: WN
I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51	Con: DN DJ WCM WNR WN So-So: DT
JANE-2/1/52	Con: DH DJ DB WB WCD BE WC WNR WSR WT None: WCM MP
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	Con: WN
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	Con: WCD WGN None: WN MP
MRS. McTHING-2/20/52	Con: WM DJ BC BL WNR WT WGN None: WNR MP
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51	Con: DH DP DJ WV WWM BC WC None: BL WNR WSR
PAL JOEY-1/3/52	Con: BL None: WNR
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	Con: DW BL WN WNR WT
THE SHRIKE-1/15/52	Con: DW WCD WGN BE WN
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	Con: WT
STALAG 17-5/8/51	Con: DM WCD BL WCU WN WNY So-So: DM
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	Con: DP DJ BL None: WCM WN WWR WSR
THREE WISHES FOR JAMIE-3/21/52	Con: DP DJ WCU WT BC WCM WSR None: WWM WN WWR MP

' Off Broadway '

Summer and Smoke, next arena production of Circle in Square playing from April 24 to June 28...An Evening of Bohemian Theatre run extended indefinitely at Cherry Lane, mail orders filled for four weeks...Dakota presented Saturday midnight at Originals Only...Step Ladder Players open season at Brevoort Hotel April 25 with Liliom ...Three Sean O'Casey one act plays to be presented for two weeks at Yugoslav Hall... Originals Only current production Bed of Neuroses panned by Gale, Variety, Characters in plot and on stage of A.P. Millison play bear no resemblance to humans living or dead. Group was warned to discriminate more in play picking...Blackfriars Guild return to active production with Louis de Wohl's The Restless Flame received three mild "pros" and one "con" from daily critics. O'Connor, Journal American, recommended biographical play of St.Augustine to all, while Shanley, Times, and Sheaffer, Eagle, okayed it for limited audience. Shanley complained script wandered too far away from subject at times. Rice, Post, voted "no" because script was ponderous...Equity Library Theatre's revival of Maurine Watkins' satiric hit Chicago praised by Rice, Post as one of group's best. Producers should consider it as basis for a musical. Kilgallen, Journal American, reported that talent scouts were considering the bass voiced Brett Somers...RATINGS: Cherry Lane-3/21/52 Pro: DC DP DB WB WV WCU.

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' Green Room Department '

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SLIM INVALID...Summer 1952 promises to be one of the slowest in Broadway history, Variety reporter and McCord, Herald Tribune, agree. Variety blames low quality of entire season, political conventions and commitments of stars. Only Guys and Dolls, The King and I, Mrs. McThing, Pal Joey, South Pacific, Top Banana and Wish You Were Here are expected to survive past September. Herald Tribune man was even more pessimistic. Only The King and I, Guys and Dolls, and Pal Joey are sure to continue, plus a few others that he doesn't care to predict.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Men who named theatres after themselves often lost them, warns Lait, Mirror...Critics picking revivals as best of season leaves field open for Wizard of Oz, grins Morehouse, WT&S...Young playwrights could do worse than study plays of 1880 to 1910 for worth while ideas, suggests Chapman, News.

ADD AUDITION IDEAS...Hopeful producer who had hired an Off Broadway house to stage a super audition to raise cash for a forthcoming musical made a mistake inviting several critics, amiably complains Gabriel, Cue. The result, a mighty sad mess, could have been reported. But Cue critic chalked up the evening to experience, and left the show's name out of his anecdote...Wish You Were Here casting call for handsome young people who could swim and dive to populate the musical's on-stage pool drew several hundred, reports Watt, News. Young man reading book "How to Swim" wasn't chosen.

CRITICISM DEFINED...British critic C.B.Purdom scientifically defines "criticism" in "Theatre" as a process of thought in which reactions are analyzed, and the work is judged according to the dramatist's intentions, while the value of what he intended is measured in relation to the nature or end in dramatic art.

MAIL BOX...Early Curtain poll conducted by Morehouse, WT&S, shows 85 percent of those answering the postcard questionnaire he has had distributed in favor of the 7:00 PM...Early matinee curtain suggested by Times reader.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Theatre could be experimental, John van Druten told Coleman, Mirror, by widening the proscenium so players and audience could be closer together...What makes Joey work, Rice, Post, asked Jose Ferrer. Awe-inspiring but inhuman drive results from fact that Ferrer simply finds plays so much fun and is stage-struck.

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' Theatre News Round Up '

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Robert Garland elected to honorary life membership in NY Critics Circle...Eric Bentley to do drama criticism for New Republic...Peter Martin named entertainment editor of Saturday Evening Post...Frank Corsaro replaces Irwin Corey in Mrs.McThing ...ANTA considering setting up on Off Broadway pilot group...Council of Living Theatre Philadelphia campaign opened, honoring Walnut Street Theatre as "oldest playhouse in English speaking world wholly devoted to living theatre"...Cornelia Otis Skinner winner of Barter Theatre, Virginia Award for outstanding acting on Broadway...Shakespeare Club of NYC award to Oliviers...Stock Managers Association Junior Awards presented to Richard Purdey and Elizabeth Parrish...Ziegfeld Club Award for best musical to Pal Joey...Comoedia Matinee Club Award to Cronyns...Freedom Foundation Award to Paul Green for his Washington, D.C. outdoor drama Faith of Our Fathers...Mexico City drama critics voted three stars of El Nino-The Boy and The Cloud, best of season...Ireland's Dublin Players, produced by Eddie Dowling, touring ...Maurice Evans to seek free exchange of players between U.S. and Britain.

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' ANTA Director & Theatre Forum '

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Four viewpoints of role of director in modern theatre production expressed by Harold Clurman, Joseph Buloff, Stanley Gould and Constance Collier at ANTA Forum "Director and the Theatre." Event sponsored by NY Chapter of ANTA as part of their April membership drive.

Problems of a director shouldn't be discussed with a general audience, Clurman, director of ANTA's Desire Under the Elms, stated. It isn't necessary for a member of the audience to know what pieces of the whole went toward his enjoyment of the evening's production. If the person enjoyed the show, then the director did a good job. The function of the director, he explained, is to assemble, coordinate, frame and package the material at hand. To do this he often has to be teacher, inspirer, editor, doctor, diplomat and sometimes psychoanalyst. Critics were panned by Clurman, who recently resigned as New Republic reviewer, for their lack of knowledge about direction. The whole response to a work of art can't be summed up, as critics often do, in the words "fast" or "slow."

Directors, as we know them, are a product of the 20th century, Buloff, director of Mrs. McThing detailed. Before this there was no need for a director because all actors and characters were stylized. But since 1910 directors, following the lead of the Moscow Art Theatre, have developed to be the focal point of theatre in translating words and ideas of author to stage. Major problem a director of imaginative mind faces today is type casting.

As an actress since the age of four and as the director of many plays, Constance Collier knows that directorship counts highest in the theatre, she related. In order to have great actors, you must first have great directors. When she was young it was very easy to get a job because the producer could hire and fire at will. Union rules today prohibit this and in so doing put a limit on amount of work actors today can get.

Eighteen years background and training that goes into becoming a director, explained by Stanley Gould, director of the four performance flop The Brass Ring. His experiences, which paralled what Clurman said a young person must do to become a director, included reading, studying, acting, getting whatever theatre jobs available, and taking other jobs to keep alive. Hardest thing was to reconcile himself to way of life contrary to normal U.S. life.

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' Late Reviews '

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Four Saints in Three Acts- Broadway 4/16/52. Slight majority of daily critics recommended ANTA limited run revival of 1934 opera with music by Virgil Thomson and libretto by Gertrude Stein. Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Watts, Journal American, enjoyed present version better than original. Former billed it as a delightful relaxing experience, plus a treat to the eye; while latter deemed it a gay, prankish musical adventure. Kerr joined Hawkins, WT&S, who liked everything but William Dollar's dance direction. Sylvester, News, thought sets were a bit too Cotton Club-ish, but otherwise it was perfect. All warned that proceedings mustn't be taken seriously or they would seem silly. Music written and directed by Thomson, music critic of Herald Tribune, was termed masterpiece by most for covering all styles within its framework. Times, Eagle and Women's Wear men dissented because they felt Stein's book even taken in a light mood was just so much gibberish that few could understand it. Atkinson, Times, feared it contained style and manner without content. Shaeffer, Eagle, thought it might have had a place as a curio, but once is enough is enough. Dash, Women's Wear, okayed it for long hairs only. Cast headed by Inez Matthews, Edward Matthews, Elwood Smith and Betty Lou Allen were rated perfedt. Same adjective applied to Maurice Grosser's direction and Paul Morrison's sets.